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Provision of Educational and Psycho-Social Support Services to Students with Disabilities in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Primary Schools in Education with a stream of Inclusive Education)

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Article

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This study was registered and approved by the institutional research ethics and review committee of Dilla University (IRERC) with protocol unique number duirb/20/18 to conduct research and publish its output based on the research and ethical guidelines of the university in accordance with the national research ethics committee guidelines in Ethiopia. Prior to participation, all participants were informed of their rights and were provided with verbal and written consent. Our study was conducted in agreement with the guidelines governing research involving human participants, as outlined by the national research ethics committee guidelines in Ethiopia. On the other hand, university research and ethical guidelines more importantly focus on the novelty of research and respecting research ethics. In this regard, the researchers scrupulously respected the participant's right to secrecy, privacy, and anonymity and tried to

ensure the novelty of the study. The interview questions were copied to the replies prior to setting up a face-to-face session. Moreover, the respondents in the study are aware that there will be no reimbursement for their time. The respondents were given the assurance that the information they provided would be kept private, and study records did not contain their names. Rather, they were represented by identifying numbers.

Provision of Educational and Psycho-Social Support Services to Students with Disabilities in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at investigating the provision of educational and psycho-social support to students with disabilities in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Primary Schools. To attain the objectives of the study, it utilized a mixed research method's explanatory sequential design. A total of 124 respondents participated in the study. Among these, *108 primary school* teachers were *selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques for quantitative data* collection, *while four principals and twelve students with disabilities were selected through purposive sampling techniques for* interviews. *Data from teachers, students with disabilities, and school principals were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and the independent sample t-test of inferential statistics were employed for quantitative data* analysis, *while qualitative data were analyzed using word-by-word thematic analysis. The study revealed that lack of assistive technology, limited awareness and professional development among teachers about how to effectively address the educational needs of students with disabilities, lack of appropriate accommodations and modifications, and lack of parental involvement in individualized education* plans *are some of the challenges that impede the provision of educational support to students with disabilities in the study area. On the other hand, lack of sufficient assistance by the school community due to social isolation and bullying, negative attitudes, stress, and peer neglect impedes the psycho-social support provision to students with disabilities in the study area. psychological study recommends that the school principals, teachers, education authorities, parents, community members, and significant* others *should work in collaboration to improve the provision of educational, psychological*, *and social support for*

students with disabilities in the study area.

Key Words: *Educational support, psychological support, social support,* student *with* disabilities, primary *schools*

INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities throughout the world continue to be one of the marginalized groups in education. In this regard, many countries often struggle to effectively integrate students with disabilities into their national education systems, which is exacerbated by lingering stigmas, inadequate school designs, and a shortage of trained teachers and suitable learning materials (UNESCO, 2017; Sarton & Smith, 2018; Ginja & Chen, 2021). Due to this, many students with disabilities find it difficult to take advantage of important programs that enhance positive learning outcomes (Boney, Potvin, and Chabot, 2019). Negative stereotypes, misconceptions, and lack of knowledge among teachers about disabilities affect the academic success of students with disabilities (Sniatecki, Perry, & Snell, 2015; Byrne, 2022; Arishi, 2019). This reluctance negatively affects the primary schools' students with disabilities, who may either have low grades or drop out of schools. Most probably society usually pays attention to where children with disabilities lack; they must focus on where they can do well (Kunwar, 2019; Acharya, 2018). Even when children with disabilities are willing to attend school, most schools are inaccessible and do not provide disability-related accommodations (Melnick, 2025).

On the other hand, including all children into education has become a significant global service choice (Chireshe, 2013). However, young children with disabilities in Africa encounter considerable obstacles when it comes to obtaining, maneuvering through, and achieving in mainstream educational environments (McClain-Nhlapo et al, 2018; Shakespeare et al, 2019; Duri and Luke, 2022). Moreover, prejudiced practices have contributed to children without disabilities receiving priority access to educational opportunities over children with disabilities (Graham et al., 2020; Goldan, Nusser, & Gebel, 2022). Furthermore, poverty, environmental barriers, a lack of accessible transportation, negative attitudes, and the lack of social protection and support services for children with disabilities have limited access to inclusive education (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024; Maciver et al., 2019; Bas¸, 2022; Asres, 2018). As a result, school enrollment for students with disabilities remains very low, with three in ten children never having been in school and only 48% of these—sometimes

even below 10%—completing primary schooling (African Child Policy Forum, 2011).

The inclusion of all children in school has given rise to an international philosophical and political movement that places social justice at the center of educational goals (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014; Yorke et al., 2023). According to Pantic & Florian (2015), this movement has been gaining momentum over time, and its guiding principles, which initially caught the attention of policymakers, educators, and parents, have now solidified themselves as a priority for social change. These goals include ensuring that everyone participates in the movement without considering individual differences and ending social exclusion (Soni et al., 2022; Cologon, 2013). To include everyone in education, the education systems in both rich and developing nations are undergoing significant reforms and adjustments now (Malak, 2013). In this regard, Incorporating Psychological support in inclusive education promotes social cohesiveness and emotional well-being in addition to improving academic results (Nemiro et al., 2022). Holistic approaches can benefit families since they develop community support networks and improve children's ability to adjust (Greenbank, 2023; Imaniah & Fitria, 2018; Hirpa, 2021). For Suleymanov (2015), numerous nations have made a commitment to acknowledge the educational requirements of children and adolescents with disabilities within their educational frameworks. As a result, there has been a discernible rise in the number of students with a variety of special needs across several nations throughout time, particularly young people with disabilities who are engaged and involved in regular classroom instruction (Pantic & Florian, 2015; Adoyo & Odeny, 2015).

At the school level, children with disabilities are more likely to be bullied and harassed, might have a limited number of friends, and engage in fewer extracurricular activities than their peers (Bills, 2020; Mawene & Bal, 2018; Bills, 2021; Soni et al., 2022), all of which affects their psychosocial development. Inadequate training of key stakeholders, poverty, poor physical access, government policies focused on children's education, the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities and their difficulties in helping them, and attitudes of society, government officials, school staff, and infrastructure were all found to be common factors which hinder the educational and psychosocial support for students with disabilities (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024; Beyene et al., 2023; Maciver et al., 2019; Babik & Gardner, 2021; Mawene & Bal, 2025). Therefore, the researchers intend to focus an investigation on the educational and psycho-social support services for students with disabilities in the study area. In Ethiopia the initial enrollment rates for children with disabilities are extremely low. Children with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school

early and not go on to secondary school or beyond, even if they do attend the school (Sarkar & Parween, 2021; Stoev et al., 2024). Children with disabilities are also at increased risk or challenge of school violence and bullying, preventing the safe enjoyment of their right to education (UNESCO, 2016; Hagarty and Morgan, 2020). Anxiety and a sense of being powerless over one's circumstances can also result from psycho-social isolation and opportunities being restricted.

In Ethiopia, education has been expanded significantly over the last 20 years, and in 2000 fewer than half of the country's children were enrolled in school; in the last two decades nearly, every child has access to and attends school (MoE, 2020). Improvements in the education of previously underserved populations, such as girls and children with disabilities, have also been brought about by this expansion of education for all. The low learning levels and achievements of students, many of whom drop out of school before completing their entire education cycle and fail to acquire even the most basic skills in reading, writing, and numeracy, are indicative of the lack of progress and skepticism surrounding improvements in the quality of education (Iyer, Rolleston, Rose & Woldehanna, 2020). These were observed due to limitations in provisions of educational and psychosocial support services for students with disabilities. Furthermore, there are significant disparities in the system; girls, children from low-income families, and people living in rural or isolated places have seen the slowest rate of improvement; children with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups (Iyer et al., 2020; Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015; Yorke, Rose & Pankhurst, 2023).

There is also little information available in Ethiopia, as in many other Sub-Saharan African nations, about the prevalence and experiences of individuals with disabilities. Because of this, it is still unclear how many children have difficulties; estimates are currently significantly low in Ethiopia (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2011) estimates that 15% of persons in any population have a disability, and it is used by the Ethiopian government for planning purposes. Therefore, it is predicted that five million Ethiopian school-age children (ages four to eighteen) have a disability. Imagine the devastation this issue does to the widespread availability of high-quality education that serves all kids, including those with impairments, throughout Ethiopia. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has established and implemented legal and policy frameworks in line with global standards, which strongly endorse the education of all individuals, irrespective of their gender, disability, socioeconomic background, language, psychological aspects, or other differences (MoE, 2016; MoE, 2015; MoE, 2012; MoE, 2010;

MoE, 2006; MoE, 1994). This demonstrated how hard the nation has been trying to ensure that everyone gets access to education. It is critical to investigate whether the educational needs of children and youth with disabilities are met by the Ethiopian government, which is working to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality, inclusive education and opportunities for lifelong learning (MoE, 2016).

The actual recent situation in Dilla Zuria primary schools related to students with disabilities is identified as a lack of opportunities for practice, taking extra time to do class assignments, and examination. Learners with disabilities have no supportive devices, materials, or equipment identified based on the type of disabilities they have been diagnosed with. The social problems of learners with disabilities are related to the absence of a supportive environment in which children are encouraged to communicate with one another. These are some of the challenges faced by students with disabilities in Dilla Zuria for regular primary school. They are weak participants and less achievers in the teaching and learning process as expected. They are ignored by peer relationships.

The community perceives that children who have disabilities are cursed and punished by God and who would never perform anything. Students with this limitation are lacking opportunity and treatment by teachers to learn in a classroom equal to other students. Moreover, the school encounters barriers such as quality of teaching, social and cultural environment, lack of facilities, poor interaction between teachers and learners, and lack of adequate equipment. The poor performance for students with disabilities even though they are learning together with their peers prompts the researchers to investigate the prevailing problems that hamper them from performing to their optimal academic potential. Therefore, this study is believed to be important to remind the government, non-governmental organizations, and other concerned bodies to investigate the magnitude and extent of the problem, assist them with supplementary materials, and consolidate the academic performance of children with disabilities.

Above all, it is highly unlikely that students with disabilities will succeed academically in underdeveloped countries due to the incredibly low enrollment, survival, and completion rates of these students. That is why it motivated us to investigate the subject at hand. In general, the current study addressed the following research questions.

- What is the educational support provided to students with disabilities in Dilla Zuria primary schools?
- What is the psychological support provided to students with disabilities in Dilla Zuria primary schools?
- What are the social supports provided to students with disabilities in Dilla Zuria primary schools?

Theoretical Framework

Today, researchers throughout the world have been able to examine human rights-suppressive activities following Horkheimer's 1937 critical theory (Hosking, 2008; Ingham, 2018). As per Ingham (2018), the analysis of a disability that questions the most fundamental presumptions that influence society is at the center of critical disability theory. The critical disability theory offers a crucial descriptive foundation for research that examines psychosocial issues related to students with disabilities (Gillborn, 2015). The disability theory tackles issues of marginalization and discrimination that interfere with the educational and psychosocial difficulties of students with impairments (Hosking, 2008). By eradicating prejudice and abuse within disability groups in different levels of education, the normative and descriptive foundations of social inquiry aim to enhance human freedom (Ingham, 2018). According to Reaume (2014), critical disability theorists define disability as a social, political, and lived reality based on power dynamics in schools and society.

In this regard, different approaches that address disabilities in society are contested by the critical disability theory (Reaume, 2014). Thus, children with disabilities have been subjected to metaphors in many countries, where the focus of disability discourse is on deficit, malfunction, insult, fear, and name-calling (Titchkosky, 2015). Hence, researchers and educators can examine how educational and psychosocial support can lead to successful students with disabilities in schools. Critical disability theory, thus, enables educators and teachers to embrace people with disabilities to assist them in meeting their learning objectives (Hosking, 2008; Ingham, 2018). Researchers and theorists who use disability theory in their work examine the difficulties related to disabilities. Disability theorists can focus on how capitalism constructs the body and social relations (Barnes, 2012). As scholars and researchers investigate societal barriers and the different psychological constraints that students with impairments encounter, the disability theory continues

to be important (Wieseler, 2018). Thus, the current researchers concentrate on the educational and psychosocial difficulties faced by students with impairments to create a framework that works.

According to Ingham (2018), to determine reflexive analysis, reflection, and theme interpretation, researchers should perform contextual analysis using Hosking's (2008) critical disability theory formulation. Ingham (2018) described disability difficulties both normatively and descriptively using Hosking's critical disability theory paradigm. Asch (2001) also examined discrimination against people with disabilities using critical disability theory and discovered That because of their impairments, people with disabilities are not given the chance to assume social responsibilities. The voices of people with learning, mental, and physical disabilities are acknowledged under the variety of models of disability (Ash, 2001). To overcome the difficulties faced by students with impairments, educational institutions should employ the human model of disability theories (Naami and Hayashi, 2012).

Because many people experience disability at some point in their lives, disability is universal (Hosking, 2008). In this regard, critical disability theory has drawn criticism from several educators for its ability to meet the needs of people with disabilities (Bernal & Roca, 2016; Oliver, 2013). Due to this, researchers employ critical disability theory to examine the experiences and viewpoints of people with disabilities since the critical disability theory is compatible with strands of qualitative research (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2017; Oliver, 2013). Through critical analysis and review, critical disability theorists aim to comprehend the viewpoints of people with disabilities (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2017). The social model of disability, multidimensionality, diversity, rights, voices of disability, language, and transformational politics are the seven tenets of disability theory (Hosking, 2008). Through critical disability theory, the researchers were able to recognize and understand the social, psychological, and educational experiences of students with disabilities in the study area.

While the goal of this research is to investigate the provisions of educational and psychosocial support services for students with disabilities in Ethiopia’s Gedeo zone primary schools, based on the three guiding questions, the researchers were able to investigate the provisions of educational and psychosocial support for students with disabilities in the study area. Thus, the respondents were able to explain their experiences with the phenomena using the three guiding questions and the five-point Likert scale questionnaires developed based on the three research questions.

ESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Research Design

Research design is a comprehensive plan for data collection in empirical research. It is a blueprint for empirical research aimed at answering specific research questions or testing specific hypotheses and must specify at least three processes, such as the data collection process, the instrument development process, and the sampling process (George, 2026). Accordingly, the researchers used a mixed research method and an explanatory sequential design to explain those facts. Mambwe (2024) defines a research design as a framework within which research is conducted, and it consists of a set of outlined guidelines for data collection and analysis of the study. To explain the situation on the ground and demonstrate the connection between the variables being examined, an explanatory sequential design was employed. Based on this, the researchers collected and analyzed the quantitative data first and followed the qualitative data collection and analysis to strengthen the findings. The researcher employed this design because both quantitative and qualitative methods were feasible for such a design to get more accurate and instructive data produced in a methodical and scientific way.

Participants

According to Al-Omari (2011), the study population is the entirety of any unit that the researcher is interested in because they share one or more characteristics. It encompassed a broader range of individuals, organizations, or objects that share one or more traits with the subject of study. It is made up of all instances of people or things that meet a particular requirement (Kothari, 2004). On the other hand, a sample is a small group or subset of a population that a researcher chooses for the study (Ahmad & Halim, 2017; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). There are 26 regular primary schools in the study area. Among these, 4 primary schools were purposefully selected where many students with disabilities are available, namely, Sisota, Gola, Chichu, and Tunticha. On the other hand, a total of 12 students with disabilities (male = 9 and female = 3), four school principals (male = 3 and female = 1), and 108 (male = 70 and female = 38) teachers were selected for the study. Totally, the study involved 124 respondents in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Dilla Zuria Woreda primary schools. Teacher respondents were chosen using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. While students with disabilities and school principals are selected through purposeful

sampling technique based on their active involvement in the schools' educational and psychosocial support provision. According to Al-Omari (2011), purposive sampling techniques involve picking units most relevant or knowledgeable in the subject matter and studying them.

As suggested by Joseph (2025), Slovin's formula is used to select 108 teachers from a total of 148 teachers in four participant schools. Slovin's formula calculates the minimum sample size needed to estimate a statistic based on a specified margin of error. The formula expresses as:

$n = N / (1 + N * e^2)$

Where:

n = minimum sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error

$n = 148/ (1+148x0.05^2) = 148/ (1+148x0.0025) = 148/ (1+0.37) = 148/1.37 = 108.03 = 108$

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected from students with disabilities, teachers, and school principals through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observation checklists. This detail was prepared and used to collect primary data from the study area. The secondary data was gathered from written documents and school reports, which are available in schools.

Questionnaires

The five-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed and used to gather quantitative data for the study under investigation. The questionnaires were prepared based on the objective, and they have both closed-ended and open-ended question items. The questionnaires were filled out in face-to-face meetings with 108 primary school teachers in the study.

Semi-structured Interviews

According to Yin (2009), one of the most crucial techniques for gathering data for qualitative

studies is an interview. Thus, this study employed the semi-structured interview guide to gather qualitative information from the school principals and students with disabilities. Interviews are defined as a series of questions given orally or in writing, or as a face-to-face conversation between the interviewees and the researcher (Frasso, Keddem, & Golinkoff, 2018; Kapur, 2018). Accordingly, the researchers prepared interview questions for the school principals and students with disabilities in the study.

Interviews were conducted in Gedeu'ffa language with students with disabilities and in Amharic language with school principals. Then, the researchers transcribed it into the English language with the help of instructors in the Department of English Language and Literature. Accordingly, interviews were conducted in a separate classroom between the researchers, students with disabilities, and school principals in the opposite shifts for an hour. Individual interviews are conducted primarily through giving the respondents flexibility and self-assurance to freely express their opinions and viewpoints in response to each question. When conducting interviews and conducting analysis, the researchers collected data using a pen, pencil, and piece of paper.

Procedures of Data Collection

For the quantitative data, the researchers administered a five-point Likert scale and distributed it to 108 teachers. Having this, the questionnaires were collected from each respondent and analyzed to get the first picture of the study result. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four students with disabilities and four school principals to gather rich, detailed information about their experiences, perspectives, and behaviors in the provision of educational and psycho-social support to students with disabilities in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Primary Schools.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviations and inferential statistics of the independent sample t-test. Then, the data was analyzed and presented on the tables. While the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thorne, Stephens, & Truant (2016) characterized the analysis of data as the most complex in qualitative study, which needs thoughtful discussion. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The advantage of using this technique is that it is highly flexible and can be modified to fit the needs

of this study, thus providing rich data. A significant amount of qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The information gathered through interviews was examined and presented using narrative and complete sentences to depict the phenomena and events as they occurred.

Reliability and Validity

Following a review of relevant literature, good study practices and accepted procedures were applied to improve the use of suitable study designs, determine the right sample size, and employ the right sampling methodologies. In this regard, the Cronbach alpha analysis was used to gauge reliability. A measure's validity was defined as how well the data fit the object of the measurement. Obtaining feedback from respondents on the tool as part of the pre-test activities would have verified its face validity. Thus, a pilot test was carried out by distributing questionnaires to 30 respondents prior to the actual data collection, and Cronbach's Alpha showed that all the results are more than acceptable, which falls in the range above 0.75. The resulting range is considered high and ensures the reliability and validity of the instrument.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics (n=30)

Sub scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
Educational support	.974	.981
Psychological support	.945	.956
Social support	.972	.972

Source: SPSS data output, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study subjected both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Therefore, the respondents for qualitative strands provided different codes as follows: students with disabilities provided with SwD1, SwD2, SwD3,…SwD12 codes, while school principals provided P1, P2, P3, and P4 codes.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Types of respondents	Frequency			Percentage		
	M	F	T	M	F	T
Students with disabilties	32	15	47	68.1	31.9	100
Teachers	70	38	108	64.8	35.2	100
School principals	3	1	4	75	25	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

The Provision of Educational Support

Table 3 The provision of educational support to students with disabilities (n=108)

No.	Items	X	SD	t	Sig.
1	The school does not provide appropriate accommodations and modifications.	3.7	.5	-2.8	.023
2	Teachers do not receive necessary training and professional development opportunities to effectively support students with diverse learning needs.	3.5	.8		
3	Students with disabilities have no access to assistive devices and resources in their classrooms.	3.3	.87		
4	The school does not promote an inclusive environment where all students feel accepted regardless of their abilities or differences.	3.3	.87		
5	Parents/guardians are not actively involved in developing individualized education plans for their children to receive special education services.	3.33	.89		
6	The physical landscape and built areas of the schools usually hinder the motivation and participation of students with disabilities.	3.2	.94		

Source**:** Field survey, 2026

Table 3 depicts the provision of educational support for students with disabilities in schools. As shown in table 3 ($X = 3.7$, $SD = .5$, $t = -2.8$, and $p < .05$), it indicates that the schools do not provide appropriate accommodations and modifications; ($X = 3.5$, $SD = .8$, $t = -2.8$, & $p < .05$) shows

teachers do not receive necessary training and professional development opportunities to effectively support students with diverse learning needs; ($X = 3.3$, $SD = .87$, $t = -2.8$, & $p < .05$) indicates students with disabilities do not have access to assistive devices and resources in their classrooms; ($X = 3.3$, $SD = .87$, $t = -2.8$ & $p < .05$) depicts the school does not promote an inclusive environment where all students feel accepted regardless of their abilities or differences; ($X = 3.3$, $SD = .89$, $t = -2.8$, & $p < .05$) depicts parents/guardians are actively involved in developing individualized education plans for their children to receive special education services; and ($X = 3.2$, $SD = .94$, $t = -2.8$, & $p < .05$) shows that the physical landscape and built areas of the schools usually hinder the motivation and participation of students with disabilities.

Thus, the quantitative findings of the current study revealed a lack of appropriate accommodations and modifications, a lack of necessary training and professional development for teachers in inclusion concepts, and a lack of students with disabilities' access to assistive devices; lack of schools promoting an inclusive environment where all students feel accepted regardless of their abilities or differences; lack of parents/guardians' active involvement in developing individualized education plans for their children to receive special education services; and physical inaccessibility in the teaching-learning process hinders the education support for students with disabilities in the study area.

In supporting the quantitative findings, one of the respondent blind students who is attending grade 5 in a regular school along with sighted peers stated that,

> I faced difficulties reading the text written on the blackboard. The teachers regularly read aloud the text on request. If I missed any information from the teacher's narrative, my peers used to explain it to me. But whatever was still unclear wasn't taught to me I forced to ask my parents. In addition, walking in the school compound and in the classroom was difficult to navigate for students with visual impairment (SwDs3 interviewee, 2026).

By further elaborating, the respondent students with physical disabilities (SWDs1) from the Gola primary school stated that "*getting into the classroom is a painful experience for me. I find it very difficult to go free into the classroom,* toilets, *and* playground; *it gives me pains in my legs."* The respondents in the study area also raised a unique challenge related to the inability of students with disabilities to access school learning materials and sanitation facilities, inconveniencing them by

making them wait until they return to their homes. In the same school, the blind student *(SwD11)* informed us that "*in my school there are no Braille materials, but I get textbooks at school that I cannot use without readers*." The other student with visual impairment *(SwD2)* in Tunticha noted a similar challenge and stated that "we *don't have any Braille* textbooks *to use in* the teaching-learning *process."*

On the other hand, students with physical disabilities from Chichu primary schools said that

> The school has support from NGOs, and due to this, there are the necessary support programs and mechanisms for modifying the curricula to consider all students. There are also trained teachers, accessible educational materials, and school facilities, and disability support services as manifestations of reducing systemic barriers to participation and success in education, but still there are limitations in accessing them freely (SwDs12 interviewee, 2026).

The other respondent with hearing loss (SWDs4), who is a grade 6 student in Chichu primary school, stated that, *"throughout my lower grade first cycle school education, I faced several challenges in my educational experiences; these challenges include difficulties with accessing learning materials and engaging in the classroom* discussions."

In another interview, a student with hearing loss also asserted that

> I am in Grade 6. The teachers are supporting and encouraging us to be active learners. They were taught by preparing materials for us. They helped us to promote from one grade to the other, and we improved and became high achievers. The teachers sometimes were cooperative enough to help us. I have no parents who are aware of supporting me to attend my education properly (SWDs9 interviewee, 2026).

According to the findings, the assistive devices for students with disabilities, such as Braille, wheelchair, tape recorder, software, and other technological devices, are not available in the school. If available, these educational provisions were vital for students to help them according to the nature of disabilities they have. One of the challenges of students with disabilities is inaccessible educational facilities and infrastructures to fulfill the requirements.

Most primary schools in the study area are poorly designed and not well equipped to meet the

needs of all learners. Lack of accessible facilities and a good classroom climate in schools, such as the inconvenient design of buildings, poor classroom arrangements, unavailability of adapted toilets and seats, inadequate space for wheelchairs, and lack of adapted ramps, signage, water supply, and playgrounds, affect successful implementation of inclusive education in the participating schools. In addition, most schools are not staffed with professionals like special educators, sign language interpreters, and psychologists. Conversely, large class size is also one of the factors, especially in most primary schools. Chichu and Sisota primary schools' compounds have convenient designs of buildings and good classroom arrangements for students with disabilities. But the case in Gola and Tunticha primary schools is different. The respondent student with a physical disability (*SwD7*) stated that "*one barrier for children with disabilities faced in accessing education was the physical challenge in travelling to school*." There are many schools located a considerable distance from their homes, and children with disabilities found the topography to be very challenging to navigate while traveling to school.

One of the respondent school principals *(P3)* from Gola Primary School also stated that "the *needs for SWD should be considered when drafting* curriculums." All assessments, teaching activities, learning activities, teaching and learning resources, and the means of assessment during the development of curriculum should not exclude SWD so that they could also become competent at the end. This indicates that the schools in Dilla Zuria woreda do not have sufficient facilities to serve students with disabilities and have no trained staff to handle them. As stated by this participant, the schools lacked the essential staff and resources required to meet the needs of students with disabilities, which seem to be the primary obstacles to education for children with disabilities. This respondent also raised that poverty is another challenge, and the community is less likely to afford education for students with disabilities. In this regard, one of the respondents in Tunticha primary school stated that

> We do not have enough money to purchase educational resources by ourselves. Our family is poor, and there is nothing to do for us. I do not believe that my disability will have an impact on my education in the future. In my opinion, I do not foresee any issues with my education arising from my impairment (SWDs5 interviewee, 2026).

Several other respondents also hold the view that a positive self-image, combined with a strong dedication to remaining in school, enhanced their participation and success in the educational

environment. The respondents enthusiastically reported notable advancements in the inclusivity and responsiveness of schools towards students with disabilities. Consequently, most schools are under-resourced. As a school principal from Tunticha Primary School, one of the major factors contributing to being under-resourced is inadequate financing. A comparable issue was highlighted by a respondent student with hearing impairment from Gola Primary School, who stated that his school lacks any support packages for students with disabilities. The requirements of students with impairments have been entirely overlooked by the school administration. Furthermore, the school does not provide us with essential educational materials such as exercise books and pens. They also stated that sometimes they were required to pay for school contributions.

Provision of Psychological Support

Table 4 Provision of psychological support to students with disabilities (n=108)

No.	Items	X	SD	t	Sig.
1	Teachers are not qualified counselors who can offer individualized emotional building.	4.3	.75	.9	.038
2	Students with disabilities have no opportunities to participate in the learning programs that can bring emotional strength.	3.33	.89		
3	Teachers and staff do not receive training in recognizing and addressing the mental health needs of students with diverse abilities.	3.42	.8		
4	Schools do not promote an environment that reduces stigma around seeking mental health concerns among students with disabilities.	3.1	.9		
5	Schools are not committed to consistent support towards students in building psychology of students with disabilities.	3.83	.4		

Source: Filed survey, 2026

In table 4 above, ($X = 4.3$, $SD = .75$, $t = .9$, & $p < .05$) shows that teachers are not qualified counselors who can offer individualized emotional building; ($X = 3.3$, $SD = .89$, $t = .9$, & $p < .05$) students with disabilities have no opportunities to participate in the learning programs that can bring emotional strength; ($X = 3.42$, $SD = .8$, $t = .9$, & $p < .05$) depicts teachers and staff do not receive training in recognizing and addressing the mental health needs of students with diverse abilities; ($X = 3.1$, $SD = .9$, $t = .9$, & $p < .05$) shows schools do not promote an environment that

reduces stigma around seeking mental health concerns among students with disabilities; and ($X = 3.83$, $SD = .4$, $t = .9$, & $p < .05$) schools are not committed to provide consistent support in building psychology of students with disabilities in the study areas. This revealed that psychological support in participating schools is challenging, and it needs the hard work of the stakeholders in the education sectors.

One of the respondent female students with visual impairment who is grade 6 told by the researcher about experiences she has had in her life before and now.

> She articulated that her intention was to convey that, within her school, students with disabilities are perceived as exceedingly weak. Furthermore, there is a lack of support for those who are considered weak. Only the strong and influential can seize what they desire. There is a noticeable absence of effort from individuals to assist students with disabilities in transforming their lives (SWDs8 interviewee, 2026).

One of the respondents with a physical disability (SwD5) who is from Tunticha Primary School, grade 5, stated that *"I usually face such challenges as feelings of fear, neglect, and low self-esteem; students like this seek the collaboration and support of people nearby him/her*." As a result, students with disabilities have been reported to feel ashamed of their condition, leading them to respond in ways that compromise their integrity. The other respondent stated that

> At school I used to cover my hand with a head scarf so that people could not see it. I was so ashamed of my disability. I avoided participation in sports. I get very angry when people ask me about my disability (SwD4 interviewee, 2026).

Most of the respondents in the study expressed negative attitudes, and inadequate social support from significant others, including teachers, peers, family, and community members, is affecting their psychological development. The respondents also elaborated on how stereotypes, prejudice, stigma, and discrimination arising from community values and institutional contexts diminish public perception of disability. A negative perception of children with disabilities and their families was also mentioned by numerous respondents as a barrier to the education of these children. Although they noted that some initiatives had been undertaken to tackle this issue, respondents felt that the advancements were inadequate, as these negative perceptions continued to exist, especially in rural and isolated areas. The discrimination that students with disabilities face sometimes causes

psychological distress, which results in avoidance of socializing with peers without disabilities.

Provision of Social Support

Table 5 The provision of social support to students with disabilities

No.	Items	X	SD	t	Sig.
1.	Students have no access to social skills training to manage stress, anxiety and other emotional challenges in their social group.	3.4	.79	4.5	.002
2.	Peer support programs were not implemented to improve school experiences and develop social connections.	3.3	.87		
3.	Parents and guardians were not encouraged in the support process.	3.0	.85		
4.	Extracurricular activities are not inclusive and accessible to all.	3.2	.94		
5.	Classmates are not aware of accepting students with disabilities.	3.18	.93		
6.	There is no good social interaction with peers in and outside the school.	3.18	.93		

Source**:** Field survey, 2026

According to table 5 above, ($X = 3.4$, $SD = .79$, $t = 4.5$, & $p < .05$) shows that students have no access to social skills training to manage stress, anxiety and other emotional challenges in their social group; ($X = 3.3$, $SD = .87$, $t = 4.5$, & $p < .05$) peer support programs were not implemented to improve school experiences and develop social connections; ($X = 3.0$, $SD = .85$, $t = 4.5$, & $p < .05$) depicted that parents and guardians were not encouraged in the support process; ($X = 3.2$, $SD = .94$, $t = 4.5$, & $p < .05$) indicates that extracurricular activities are not inclusive and accessible to all; ($X = 3.18$, $SD = .93$, $t = 4.5$, & $p < .05$) shows classmates are not aware of accepting students with disabilities; and ($X = 3.18$, $SD = .93$, $t = 4.5$, & $p < .05$) indicates that there is no good social interaction with peers in and outside the school.

Getting children with disabilities access to exercise their right in any school community setting, private or in a group, is very significant. One of the reasons that children with disabilities are unable to attend school is the insufficient awareness among their families. Families often do not perceive themselves as being inadequate for social relations; rather, they believe that their children are not destined for living and learning alone. However, poverty can also hinder children with disabilities from attending school, leading to additional repercussions for their overall life of social

opportunities. One of the respondent students with physical disability (SwD6), who lost his upper right limb and attending grade 7 in Tunticha primary school, informed that, *"I am strong and self-confident. I never wanted someone to help me. I attend school and help myself to fulfill the social relation* challenges, *but still poverty is a challenging issue in my life*."

On the other hand, the respondent with physical disability told the study that,

> The attitude of the society where I grew up makes me greatly happy. Community fears doing wrong, and teasing persons with disabilities is rejected by culture and religion too. I can go with my peers, but participating in sports fields and other extracurricular activities was challenging, so it has a lot of impact on my life (SWDs2 interviewee, 2026).

This restrictive environment has also affected their ability to excel in education and social integration. They reported that they are often categorized as low academic achievers. They mentioned that members of the community are cautious to refrain from using traumatizing language that could be used to bully or mock them.

The respondent with visual impairment, who is a grade 8, gentle, and self-esteemed student from Chichu Primary School, stated that,

> I feel good at school because we share jokes, play together, and do a lot of good things. We interview ourselves, take quizzes, and have entertainment; we learn, and we do a lot of good things at school, which encourages us to be very good. This is our good side in the classroom having disability (SWDs12 interviewee, 2026).

This implies that they possess strong social skills that allow them to cultivate beneficial relationships with their peers and the school community, thereby enhancing their learning experiences and outcomes. Students with disabilities also reported that the absence of inclusive primary schools in remote villages compelled those from rural backgrounds to relocate to nearby semi-urban and urban areas where such schools are accessible. This migration resulted in a loss of family support, which, combined with insufficient school assistance, exacerbated their social skills development in their schooling.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicated that most students with disabilities did not receive specialized academic support services from their teachers. In other words, there was no alignment of the curriculum to meet their needs, no innovative practices implemented, no special tutoring provided, and no modifications made to the various instructional activities. Previous research findings indicated that differentiation of teaching is basically necessary to help students with disabilities acquire real-life skills and to help them continue their education in harmony with students without disabilities in the same learning environments (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024; Maciver et al., 2019; Bas, 2022; Asres, 2018). This encompasses the modification and adaptation of the curriculum to meet the requirements of students with special needs, enhancing flexibility and teaching effectiveness, and adjusting teaching methods, assessment strategies, activities, and timetables. Nevertheless, the results of this study indicated that teachers did not alter examination and class schedules specifically for students with disabilities. They usually use the same types of educational approach (teaching strategy, activities, assessment techniques, schedules, media, and seating strategy) for all students without differentiating them (Ingham, 2018).

The prior study by Arishi et al. (2017) identified that teacher support of inclusive education favored students' integration into the school. Significantly, the findings of the present study highlight the essential importance of self-determination and the commitment of students with disabilities in achieving success in their education. Goldan, Nusser, & Gebel (2022) reported on the positive association between the educational motivation of students with disabilities and their teachers' support and communication to foster a sense of school belongingness and learning outcomes. The factors that facilitated remaining in school included the capacity to manage various systemic, institutional, and attitudinal obstacles through determination and creativity (Iyer et al., 2020; Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015; Yorke, Rose & Pankhurst, 2023; Brydges & Mkandawire, 2017).

Studies by Graham et al. (2020) and Yorke et al. (2021) reported, indicating that disparities in education, resources, infrastructure, and quality of life between rural and urban regions compel rural youth to relocate to urban areas. For instance, Yorke et al. (2021) reported that even if migrating youth access greater opportunity to continue their higher levels of schooling with increased freedom, it comes at the cost of losing family and community support and experiencing highly uncertain urban living and challenges for the future.

Similar findings were also reported by other researchers. For instance, a study in Ethiopia (Iyer, Rolleston, Rose & Woldehanna, 2020) found schools prioritizing regular students' academic performance over creating an inclusive school environment for students with disabilities. It was reported that a specific school received national recognition for the outstanding academic achievements of its students; however, it failed to adequately address fundamental aspects of accessibility and the inclusion of students with disabilities.

The research also recognized educational assistance and individual coping mechanisms that aided students with disabilities in remaining in school (McClain-Nhlapo et al., 2018; Shakespeare et al., 2019; Duri and Luke, 2022). Although on a small scale, emotional, financial, and material support from friends, family, and teachers has been reported to have facilitated education. But government and nongovernmental organizations' support towards students with disabilities was limited to continuing their education. The finding implies that the role of diverse support in the educational participation and success of students with disabilities seemed significant.

The physical environment and constructed spaces of schools and communities often obstruct the mobility and engagement of students with disabilities. A participant from the study areas highlighted the issue of school physical accessibility, which complicates movement for students with disabilities. The finding is proponent of the research conducted by Bani Odeh & Lach (2024), Beyene et al. (2023), Maciver et al. (2019), Babik & Gardner (2021), and Mawene & Bal (2025), which stated that students with disabilities face challenges such as discrimination, inaccessible environments, negative attitudes from teachers and students without disabilities, and lack of institutional support.

Conclusion

- The study confirmed that the inaccessibility of the school's physical environment, insufficient resources, and support provided to students with disabilities restricted their educational and psychosocial participation in schools.
- It also revealed that numerous schools were not providing educational and psychosocial accommodations to students with disabilities.
- Among numerous factors, the disability recognition of family was identified as a challenge in delivering educational and psychosocial support to students with disabilities.

- The study exhibited a negative attitude from significant others such as peers; teachers and the community members hinder the education and psychosocial support needed for students with disabilities in the study area.
- The findings indicated that the primary obstacles hindering the provision of educational and psychosocial support services for students with disabilities include insufficient funding to implement various programs for these students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following suggestions have been made for further improvement on the provision of educational and psycho-social supports to students with disabilities.

- Teachers and school principals should create compassionate and healing classrooms where educational and psychosocial intervention strategies are identified and implemented.
- The school principals must ensure that counseling centers are established in schools to help students with disabilities.
- Peers of students with disabilities should be strengthened by teachers and school principals to be served as special buddies for students with disabilities.
- The schools should develop specific rules, regulations, and guidelines that are used to guide the educational and psychosocial support provisions for students with different disabilities.
- The local government should revise the implementation plan for enrollment, retention, success in school, and life skill development in coordination and participation with the schools and NGOs working in the field of education for students with disabilities.
- Along with financial and material support, the government should also supply qualified educators and ensure that assistive technologies and material resources are available.
- The school principals, teachers, education authorities, parents, community members, and significant others should work in collaboration to improve the provision of educational, psychological, and social support for students with disabilities.

Declarations

i. Ethical approval

This study was registered and approved by the institutional research ethics and review committee of Dilla University (IRERC) with protocol unique number duirb/20/18 to conduct research and publish its output based on the research and ethical guidelines of the university in accordance with the national research ethics committee guidelines in Ethiopia. Prior to participation, all participants were informed of their rights and were provided with verbal and written consent. Our study was conducted in agreement with the guidelines governing research involving human participants, as outlined by the national research ethics committee guidelines in Ethiopia. On the other hand, university research and ethical guidelines more importantly focus on the novelty of research and respecting research ethics. In this regard, the researchers scrupulously respected the participant's right to secrecy, privacy, and anonymity and tried to ensure the novelty of the study. The interview questions were copied to the replies prior to setting up a face-to-face session. Moreover, the respondents in the study are aware that there will be no reimbursement for their time. The respondents were given the assurance that the information they provided would be kept private, and study records did not contain their names. Rather, they were represented by identifying numbers.

ii. Consent to participate

I verbally agree to participate, in a research study entitled "***provision of educational and psycho-social support to students with disabilities in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Primary Schools***." Read and understand the information provided about this research work. Understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that my child and I may withdraw at any time before the publication of the findings. Understand that all information will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify my personality. Understand that all data will be stored securely for five years following the study. Understand that the school by which I am working will receive a report on the findings of this study and will provide any complaints related to the study findings via the email details indicated below for this purpose.

If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr. Mesfin Abebe, who is the Research Ethics officer, by e-mail at rped.rethics@du.edu.et or cell phone at +251463314598. Moreover, I understood that

this research work has received permission from the Institutional Research Ethics and Review Committee (IRERC) with protocol unique number duirb/20/18.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research work and grant my permission for the data to be used in the process of completing research and any other future publications. I also grant permission for interviews to be audio-recorded.

Name: _____

Signature _____

Date: _____

iii. Consent to publish

I verbally agree with the publication of the findings of the study entitled "***Provision of Educational and Psycho-Social Support to Students with Disabilities in Ethiopia's Gedeo Zone Primary Schools***," in which I involved. Read and understand the information provided about this study. Understand that all information will be kept confidential and all the data will be stored securely. Understand that the schools by which I am working will receive a report of the findings of this study and will provide the complaints via the email details below for this purpose.
If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr. Mesfin Abebe, who is the Research Ethics officer, by e-mail at rped.rethics@du.edu.et or cell phone at +251463314598. Moreover, I understood that this research work has received permission from the Institutional Research Ethics and Review Committee (IRERC) with protocol unique number duirb/20/18. By signing below, I agree with the publication of the study findings in the Humanities and Social Sciences Communications.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

iv. Human Ethics and Consent to Participate declarations

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate declarations: not applicable

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